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SHAKESPEARE IN RECENT YEARS

II. THE THEMES OF TRAGEDY

Any discussion of Shakespearean tragedy that contained no reference to the dramatist's humour would be blind, indeed, to the genius of the man. He is the one great master of Tragedy who at the same time is also a master of Humour and Comedy. He is the creator of Falstaff as well as of Hamlet; and what a difference in the two worlds! In this I think no figure in literature quite approaches him, unless, indeed, it be old Homer, who certainly has elements of both pity and laughter. But is it still believed generally, with Mr. Andrew Lang, that the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" can be strictly contemporaneous and works by one and the same mind? It is one reason why the name Homer stands alone in his lofty majesty as the representative of a great ancient civilization and art. Good "Maister Chaucer" united the same elements of humour and pathos in his dramatic Tales, and this is why Chaucer, in the annals of English poetry, in breadth of vision and insight, comes nearest to Shakespeare. The great Goethe conceived the scene in Auerbach's Keller, as well as the Temptation and Prison Scene in "Faust;" he transmuted folksongs and wrote the idyllic "Hermann and Dorothea" as well as the classic "Iphigeneia;" he produced the romantic "Sorrows of Werther" as well as the realistic "Elective Affinities" and the philosophical biography of "Wilhelm Meister" as well as the genial "Autobiography." We may not call Milton humorous, but he gave us the idyllic grace and charm of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," the lyric perfection of "Lycidas," and the ringing moral enthusiasm of the Sonnets to set over against the larger epic flights of "Paradise Lost." Byron, when he felt the immensity of nature, or pondered over "the glory that was Greece' and the grandeur that was Rome's," wrote a canto of "Childe Harold;" when his errant mood altered to the flippant and cynical and farcical, he added another set of stanzas to "Don Juan," the greatest burlesque poem in our literature.

But if we name other English poets, we are too apt to be reminded of one dominant characteristic note alone, however resonant and stirring. We name Spenser, and we think of the poet of the "Faerie Queen" and the Marriage Hymns. We name Herrick, and we mean the sweets of paganism —

. . . . of brooks, of blossoms, birds and bowers
Of April, May, of June and July flowers;
. . . . of may-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bride-grooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes.

We name Dryden, and we think of the heroic couplet in satire and of the Odes for Music — wherein "he raised a mortal to the skies" and which almost lifted "Honest John" into a higher class. We name Pope, we think of the same heroic couplet brought to an even finer polish in Satires and Epistles. We name Burns, we think of the most natural lyrical poet of the race. We name Wordsworth, it is of the joy in nature, of the simple in life, of an effluence shed down from above on common things, of a high reflectiveness and a deep moral earnestness. We name Coleridge, it is of the witchery of the supernatural. We name Shelley, it is of "the longing of the moth for the star." We name Keats, it is that

Beauty is truth; truth, beauty — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

To paraphrase Mr. Watts-Dunton: These with their one voice can sing one tune or in fortunate cases with one voice can sing many tunes. But when we name names like Homer and Shakespeare, "having, like the nightingale of Gongora, many voices, [they] seem to be able to sing all tunes."

The steady growth of Shakespeare's dramatic powers and poetic genius which lead up to the highest themes of tragedy is perhaps best seen just in the early plays, usually comedies.

In structure you observe how the early plays portray their characters in groups and by their external situation, and not by inward traits as later. In the "Comedy of Errors," for instance, there are two brothers and two Dromios, two sisters contrasted in disposition who mate with the two brothers, two parents separated and reunited. In "Love's Labour's Lost" the grouping

goes by threes: there is a king and three gentlemen together with a princess and three ladies, to fall in love with each other; three oddities — the fantastical Spaniard, the pedagogue and the preacher — and three lower representatives: Costard, Moth and Dull. In "Two Gentlemen of Verona" two gentlemen are contrasted, two ladies are crossed, and two suitors rejected. Chiefest of all, two clowns are differentiated: humorous Launce with his dog, and witty Speed with his verbal quips — the fathers of all Shakespeare's later clowns and fools.

And what clowns they are! Launcelot Gobbo — a distant relation and namesake of Launce's — the blundering Dogberry, the philosophical Touchstone, the merry Feste, to the dear fool in "Lear" who went to bed at noon and didn't wake up because there was no longer need for him in the play. English and American humour have developed very differently and each has its own special national flavor, but in any discussion as to the English sense of humour, towards which we Americans are apt to be unfair because very different from our own, we may remember that English literature possesses Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, Sterne, Goldsmith, Lamb, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray — and in these qualities, too, Shakespeare and Chaucer easily lead.

In "Midsummer Night's Dream" three distinct threads are interwoven: those of the Court, the base and rude Mechanicals, and the Fairies. At Court there are again two pairs of lovers crossed and recrossed, which finds a contrasting echo in Titania's dream. The structure, with all its deftness, is still based upon balance and antithesis. The contemporary tragedy of youth, "Romeo and Juliet," has two factions, two gentlemen in pursuit of the same lady, two principal adherents, and the so-called "comic" figures, Mercutio and the Nurse — a companion each for the hero and the heroine.

But in none of these earliest plays is there any specially deep insight or keen portrayal of character. There is what you expect to find in the work of youth: sparkle, plays on words, witty repartee. However, in "Midsummer Night's Dream" a growing change is apparent. While still lacking in dramatic characterization, this play shows advance in the exercise of both poetic

fancy and imagination. The three threads are skillfully intertwined to make a perfect pattern. The play has a lyrical tone which produces an operatic effect. It is fanciful and is charmingly poetic in the interpretation of these fancies. It also contains Shakespeare's first conscious poetic creed:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact
The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Yet with all its poetry — indeed, in its very enthusiasm for poetry and its luxuriance of fancy — “*Midsummer Night's Dream*” is still the comedy of a young man. The folk and fairy lore is delightful and convincing. We may not easily believe in the transformations of a “*Comedy of Errors*” at Ephesus, but we can believe those in “*Midsummer Night's Dream*” caused by the family quarrels of Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of Fairyland. The author of “*Midsummer Night's Dream*,” even better than the playwright in “*Peter Pan*,” so happily presented by Miss Maude Adams for two seasons in New York, might ask the audience: “Good people, do you believe in fairies?” Of course we do, imaginatively and poetically.

Not only is this play conscious poetry, but in “the play within the play” — “the most lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe” — the poet has something to say of his art as playwright. “*Pyramus and Thisbe*,” at the absurdities of which we laugh so heartily, could not have been very different from the crude plays then and still presented by the English house-servants. We know that within the sound of the whirring trolley-car London mummers still give presentations of *St. George and the Turkish Champion*. Mr. Thomas Hardy has a vivid portrayal of such a play in the pages of one of his strongest novels, “*The Return of the Native*.” And what marvels may we not still see in the amateur theatricals of small towns and schools! As for *Bully Bottom*, whose “chief humour is for a tyrant — or a part to tear

a cat in, to make all split," and who has the ambition to play every part at once, he anticipates in genuine humour the universal genius of Falstaff, equal to all situations. In the "Pyramus and Thisbe" story itself, after making us laugh at its ludicrousness, Shakespeare seems to have said: "You laugh, do you? I shall take the same catastrophe of two lovers and make you thrill. The lover shall again think his lady dead, and shall do himself to death, and she discovering this shall die too at his side—and this play I shall call not 'Pyramus and Thisbe' but 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

In the "Merchant of Venice" Shakespeare has freed himself from the powerful influence, hitherto so marked, of his great predecessor, Marlowe. The subject was suggested by Marlowe's "Jew of Malta," but the difference in the portrayal is that between a monster and a human soul. The dramatist is getting away from the mere grouping of characters. He is growing both in poetic expression and in dramatic grasp, in insight and in interpretation of character. Shakespeare again took an old plot, perhaps an old play. He probably started out with the intention of making the Jew grotesque and ridiculous after the pattern of the cheater cheated, which was the common Elizabethan attitude toward one of the race. If so, the character outgrew the author's original intentions. Shakespeare's dramatic imagination is here at work, and far from remaining a comic figure, of which there are many suggestions, Shylock grows real under the dramatist's hands and is the psychological prototype of those stupendous later creations: Hamlet, Othello, Iago, Lear, Macbeth and Cleopatra. All these are conceived as great figures of tragedy; and Shylock, too, is really a creature of tragedy. Tragedy is here, as later, a spiritual conception. The poet's imagination ran away with him and the play assumes tragic proportions in the fourth act. We in turn have become wrought up and are not satisfied at Shylock's merely disappearing. We are only half-reconciled by the delicious music and moonlight of runaway Jessica in the fifth act of anticlimax. We are assured by Lorenzo:

The man that hath no music in himself
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,

Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils; . . .
Let no such man be trusted.

Yes! yes! that is all very well, we feel, but where all this time is the father-in-law, Shylock. Not all the world is on a honeymoon. This very lack of inner symmetry declares the "Merchant of Venice" to be a great play of a comparative beginner.

In Shakespeare's one tragedy of this period, "Romeo and Juliet," Mercutio, who approaches a merry figure in a sad recital and whose description of Queen Mab is the very ecstasy of folklore madness, is stabbed in a duel. He becomes serious only in the last moment: "Why the devil came you between us?" he cries to Romeo, "I was hurt under your arm." And then comes one of ill-starred Romeo's characteristic replies: "I thought all for the best." But Mercutio was no longer needed in the plot and his removal was in accord with dramatic laws. Such a gallant was bound to die that way sooner or later — by an accident! Shakespeare dramatically makes use of such accidents, for they occur in real life. It is such an accident that Desdemona drops the handkerchief at the one moment Iago can pick it up and do her harm. There is consequently nothing inherently improbable in the circumstances of Mercutio's fate. It is characteristic and necessary. The jester is out of the way for the more serious business of the tragedy of the lovers. Mercutio's death by Tybalt is the direct cause of Tybalt's death by Romeo and that of Romeo's banishment, and that of the ultimate tragedy in the tomb. It is another accident, but again nowise inherently improbable, that Juliet wakes a few moments too late and finds her lover dead beside her. But in the "Merchant of Venice" we were simply asked to forget that Shylock, the hateful old thing, exists, and we betake ourselves at once to moonlight and music and bussing bridal pairs. No wonder Shylock has found sympathizers at being stuck away in a dark closet to say *Ave Marias*.

In the intermediate plays, for our purpose here, but one point need be emphasized. It is in "Henry IV." The growing humanity, already displayed in Shylock and to be fully realized in the later conceptions of tragedy, is also displayed, though very differently, in Falstaff. Falstaff is thoroughly a creature

of the senses, portrayed with an irresistibility of audacity. In every encounter as to truth and honour, who can gainsay him? Who but Falstaff may be a coward upon "instinct," conclude by force of syllogism that honour is but air and a mere 'scutcheon, and moralize upon all others: "Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying!" Yet how fond the dramatist is of his creation and how great-hearted and tender in his dealings with him! Prince Hal, now become King at the close of the play, may banish him not to come near his person on pain of death. But the poet does not stop there. In "Henry IV" he tells of Falstaff's fate with the large sympathy and humanity only the masters possess:

'A made a finer end, and went away and it had been any Christome child: 'a parted ev'n just between Twelve and One, ev'n at the turning o' th' Tyde; for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers end, I knew there was but one way; for his Nose was as sharpe as a pen and 'a babled of green fields.

As you know, the reading of the last clause is due to Pope's "Poor piddling Tibbald," the story of which Professor Lounsbury has told at length in his third volume of "Shakespearean Wars." The original had "a table of green fields," and with the change of one letter and the addition of another, it became "a babled of green fields." It is possibly the happiest single conjecture in all Shakespearean emendation, and one which no later editor has had the courage to reject.

Was the old sinner, as some have conjectured, going over in his mind the Twenty-third Psalm? —

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . .
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside the still waters.

I cannot think so. It takes away somehow from the magnanimity of the conception. Surely it was rather the scenes of his childhood, as yet innocent and unspotted, the green fields and lanes of a boy's dreams, that hovered in the broken man's disordered mind; though we may remember that Falstaff is authority for the statement that he was once a choir boy and cracked his voice singing Psalms. It is such touches of tenderness in

dealing with the clowns and villains, the overthrown and weak ones of his plays, that we realize a psychological unity in the Shakespearean mind — from Henry VI and Richard III to Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and the Caliban of "The Tempest."

One thing is clear: the poet's art had outgrown the restrictions of the history play. The spirit and genius of comedy which had preserved him while working upon "Henry IV" carries him on for a short while longer. He achieves his triumphs in Romantic Comedy in the banter and repartee of "Much Ado," in the forest scenes and moralizings of "As You Like It," in the dainty melancholy of "Twelfth Night"—and suddenly there comes a great change and the spirit of Comedy, too, ceases. Singularly enough, up to this time no pure tragedy had been attempted since "Romeo and Juliet," and no one at all dealing with the profounder problems of life in its fateful relations.

One approaches the subject of Shakespeare's tragic themes with a good deal of trepidation. In saying these are the highest themes Shakespeare touched, we are simply repeating that tragedy is the highest dramatic mode, that drama is the supreme form of poetry, and that poetry is the greatest of all literary productions. Among the countless books on Shakespeare that have appeared in recent years, a very remarkable one entitled "Shakespearean Tragedy" was written by Mr. A. C. Bradley, then Professor of Poetry in Oxford. The volume consisted of ten lectures delivered at Oxford chiefly on "Hamlet," "Othello," "King Lear," and "Macbeth." Since vacating that chair Mr. Bradley seems to be extending his method in the study of other plays, and we find a paper on "Antony and Cleopatra" in a late number of the *Quarterly Review*.

This work is a return to the methods of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, and it seems to me frankly, amid the mountains of miscellaneous matter produced, to be one of the most notable English contributions to Shakespearean criticism since those early nineteenth century giants. The method is more intensive, but otherwise the attitude is the same as that of a century ago — that of treating the great plays as realities and seeing in them the interpretation of living souls. I am well aware that some object to the method, and often it may seem futile to con-

sider every action and every word as if the character were actually alive and to build a great system thereupon. But the aim of the dramatist is to realize a fragment of life, and it seems just for actor and critic, both interpreters, to treat a great character and conception, for their purposes, as existing and real.

It is not singular, then, that among the philosophers — students of the essence of character and motive and being — we have found the keenest interpreters of Shakespeare's work. It is no accident that the greatest interpreter of the theoretical laws of the drama among the ancients was Aristotle, and in modern days was the man who has stuck his finger into most pies — Hegel. Mr. Bradley admits frankly that he takes his point of departure from Hegel's *Æsthetik* — in an article in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1904 — but he adds that the development of many details (where Hegel is silent) is his own.

Very briefly stated, Mr. Bradley's point of view and approach is something like the following. "What is tragedy?" he asks. Following the general mediæval conception, he would describe it as a great person meeting with an awe-inspiring calamity. Such a great person may be of high rank and great estate, or it may be, it is only his passion that makes him great, as is the case with Romeo and with Othello — although, too, the latter has "done the State some service." In all tragedy there is some sort of collision or conflict — whether of feelings, wills, thoughts, purposes, or by persons with circumstance.

About the central theme there are many minor themes. To heighten the effect abnormality of mind is often introduced, as with Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Also the supernatural is thus made use of, as in "Richard III," "Julius Cæsar," "Hamlet" and "Macbeth." Chance or accident comes in to disarrange plans: Romeo doesn't get the friar's message and thinks Juliet is really dead, Juliet wakes a few moments too late, etc. On the principle of contrast, humour also finds a place even in Tragedy, with telling effect by one who is master of both forms.

Mr. Bradley, therefore, arrives at this definition or description of Shakespearean tragedy: "The story is one of human actions producing an exceptional calamity and ending in the

death of a man in high estate." It is not the suffering itself which constitutes tragedy, but the human action whereby suffering is produced.

It will be perceived at once that many current conceptions borrowed from Greek tragedy can remain no longer true of Shakespeare's work, and that Shakespeare has many characteristics in no way applicable to the drama of the great Norwegian, Ibsen, who has lately died, the next greatest departure in tragedy, since Shakespeare, from traditional paths.

The essence of Shakespearean tragedy is the understanding and portrayal of the spiritual powers of man. This is the approach of the modern world. It is no external fate or destiny that seems to cause the tragedy: destiny is the logical working out of traits in a man's own nature. Character is destiny. Romeo is precipitate: he goes to the Capulet ball uninvited, he jumps over the garden wall to speak with the girl he has just met, he marries Juliet off-hand, he comes between Tybalt and Mercutio, he slays the bloody Tybalt and later he slays himself at the tomb of his lover—it is all of a piece. The tragedy comes from the qualities of Romeo's character and not from an unfavorable star or frowning Providence.

The ambition of Richard III, shrinking at no cruelty and at no murder that advances him the crown, is true to the splendid will-power that brushes away the dreams and visions of conscience and dies gallantly on Bosworth Field. Here is a monster, if you will, but no coward. We need not admire all qualities, but we do admire many qualities. This sympathy with the dramatist's own villains, this humaneness, this sweetness of humanity, already noted in Falstaff's case, is a distinct Shakespearean trait. We admire Richard III's imperious will—this alone makes the wooing of Anne tolerable—we must admire even the perfection of Iago's cruelty and the greatness of Shylock's passion for revenge.

The "exceptional calamity" comes from the characters themselves being exceptional in the minds of the poet and in the view of the audience; and because this is so, there results tragedy. It happens to that *one person just so*, when it would not happen to another. Coleridge acutely observed that Othello, being just

what he is, is deceived by a trick that Hamlet would have seen through in an instant. Put Othello, the man of action, in "Hamlet," and Hamlet, the melancholy brooder, in "Othello," and the plot would not have dragged through five acts. Othello kills the woman he loves for his very love's sake and not for any lesser motive. Discovering his terrible mistake, the same sense of honour and duty forbid him to live, and the knife is plunged into his own bosom. The particular character of the man explains all.

Brutus is sure that he is doing right in murdering Cæsar — he is consciously moved only by dictates of honour — and because "he is an honourable man," which Antony knows full well, he falls an easy victim. It is the high sense of honour and of self that involves himself and the State in disaster, and this is the pity of it! Henry VI is a poet and philosopher, Richard II is personally lovable, "that fair rose of York;" but each of these and none other in his day had to be King of England, and as neither in his own nature and temperament was able to be King, evil must result. The limitations in Henry IV's nature do not permit him to understand his own son, and he wishes for an heir a Hotspur in place of the future hero of Agincourt.

It is by reason of this attitude, in their study of the psychological qualities of the subject, that students like Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Mr. Bradley are so illuminating in their interpretation. They believe, and I think rightly, that Shakespeare did more, consciously more, than write mere stage plays: he was writing for a wider literary audience, too. Tragedy — Shakespearean tragedy — is the great thing it is, because it displays a great soul in its elemental passions, strained and riven. In such presence we cease to be flippant — the suffering, the waste of human powers, and the destruction of human life, of the good and beautiful, or what ought to have been true and lovely, closes the mouth of the cynic. And this higher conception, this wide sympathy, underlies every great drama of Shakespeare's. The tragedy rests not in the mere death, for with Hamlet we feel death to be a release; it lies in the needless waste of good or possible good. And this constitutes in itself a moral idea! We feel pity, terror, awe; but we do not feel crushed down, over-

whelmed, hopeless. Herein Shakespeare differs from — one may not say, is superior to, for there are very different opinions on this point — other great dramatists, very ancient and very modern. There is thus in Shakespeare's plays a moral order, a moral necessity, in a wider sense; and the brilliant Professor Santayana in his recently published philosophical series is surely unsympathetic and wrong in denying this to the dramatist. There are ultimate lessons, though there should be no particular creed and specialized narrow faith.

Brutus is honourable and "Honest Iago" dishonourable; but both alike are caught in the mesh of their own actions passing by a higher moral necessity far beyond them. Lear's poor judgment and mistake overwhelms himself and others, all that he loves and holds dear in this life. Othello is meaning to do right and murders innocence. Coriolanus's feelings are reached by his family where he did not foresee weakness, and he succumbs. Lady Macbeth can cry to her husband, "We fail! But screw your courage to the sticking-place, And we'll not fail!" and yet she is tormented out of reason by the thought and smell of a single spot of blood: "Out, damned spot, out, I say! . . . All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!" What an echo of her husband's greater saying: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red." Macbeth wishes the crown and plays falsely to get it, but the crown brings to him all horrors in its train.

Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!
Macbeth doth murder sleep, the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, [etc.]

Why, this man who is a murderer is a poet too, and he has not taken into account his own sensibilities — the acting of his imagination and the workings of his conscience.

One reason why many see in the Sonnets an autobiographical experience, telling of love and devotion for a young man from whom there is estrangement and of a woman "colored ill" in

both appearance and character is, that it seems to help explain the later great tragedies wherein the sex relation suddenly becomes singularly prominent. None of the plays written before 1600 need have had the experience of the Sonnets: all the plays written after 1600 point to some change in the poet's intellectual and spiritual attitude. Yet it may be merely a coincidence. "Romeo and Juliet" was a tragedy of youth; now first are produced themes which only a mature mind could handle, a mind that seemingly had suffered the disappointment of disillusion and ingratitude.

Hamlet learns that "something is rotten in the State of Denmark" and it suddenly comes upon him with overwhelming force that "something" in his mother. The sensitive melancholy brooding young man returns from the German university to Elsinore to find his father dead, his mother newly married, and his most sickening suspicions seemingly confirmed.

O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah, fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely! That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two, [etc.]

This explains Hamlet's seeming harsh treatment of Ophelia — "Get thee to a nunnery, Go! go!" — and poor Ophelia, who has oftentimes been shockingly misunderstood, always lonely and with none to unburden herself to, when her father to whom she owes obedience is killed by the man she loves, goes mad. Was it this situation that suggested to Tennyson his "Maud?"

The height of the play is reached in the interview between the spoiled Queen and the for once determined and outraged son: "Why, how now, Hamlet. . . . Have you forgot me?" the woman asks. And the son replies:

No, by the rood, not so!
You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
And — would it were not so! — you are my mother.

"Othello" is so modern that we might expect to find an account of it any morning in the special editions of our New York sensational daily newspapers. You may almost see the red and green headlines as they might have been printed the other day in their account of the murder. The black-a-moor that ran off with and married the lovely white girl! How at the time society wagged its tongue and how her father carried on and disowned her! And what was the result? Murder and suicide!

But what may not be thus told is the proportion and symmetry of structure, the poetry of the play, and the marvellous characterization of Othello, of Iago, of Desdemona. I once had a girl pupil — but only one — who admired Othello and understood how Desdemona could have acted as she did. All the rest in seven years' experience at a State coëducational university thought Othello generally "horrid." The nobility in the Moor — and, as revealed, it is a distinct Shakespearean trait — transcends race, and this is the inspiration of Desdemona's love. The spiritual conflict and waste is the tragedy in Shakespeare's view. With all its beautiful poetry and wonderful structure, the play is terrible because it is the terrible tragedy of race and sex — the most elemental instincts imaginatively portrayed. Some one has said, if Desdemona could be impersonated by as great an actress as Salvini is actor, portraying Othello, the spectacle would be unbearable, it would be so painful.

Could we, too, actually realize the sufferings and the pain of Lear and Cordelia, our human natures could no more endure that play. In "King Lear" the mad passion of the two sisters for Edmund chiefly contributes to the catastrophe. The external terrors of the storm, to which the King and his attendant Fool are subjected, but feebly suggest the horrible tempest within the King's breast. "Oh, fool, I shall go mad!" And Lear does go mad. Late fiction writers have attempted for the dramatic effect to reproduce this situation of external storm in sympathy with inner passion, for instance, George Eliot in "Silas Marner" and George Meredith in "The Ordeal of Richard Fernal." Lear's instincts rescue Cordelia from the wretch who has hanged her, and he bears her in his arms:

Howl! Howl! Howl! Howl! O, you are men of stone!
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That Heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever! . . .
Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little . . .
Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.

There is a nobleness and atonement in Lear's sad end that glorifies him and which could not be found in his prosperity.

In "Macbeth" the married pair are united not by a common joy but by a common guilt. In "Antony and Cleopatra" we almost hold our breath at the audacity and success of the poet—a "Romeo and Juliet" with the passion transferred from youth to middle life! It is far more destructive, and empires, as well as lives, are thrown away. Helen of Troy may be a myth, although when in Greece two winters ago I met in Sparta a loyal Greek who was convinced that the lady had lived quietly among the olive groves of Eurotas valley beneath the snows of Taygetus, until wearying of the monotony she welcomed a trip across the seas in company of Paris. But Cleopatra is in history—the most famous and fascinating woman in history—and the portrayal of the dramatist had to be limited by the claims of history. Yet Shakespeare makes her equally famous in drama. She is his most difficult and so most successful woman portraiture. Here is no fourteen-year-old Juliet, no Portia of Belmont and no Rosalind in a Forest of Arden. It is "the blown rose," as she describes herself, but the petals are not yet fallen. I never was able to learn precisely what was Dr. Osler's opinion of a man become forty; but at forty a woman is just becoming dangerous. And Cleopatra is such a woman—the "serpent of old Nile." Antony passes away near the end of the fourth act, and the closing act is reserved for Majesty itself, and she dies worthy of her queenship and her charms:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me.

The strength and magic and poetry of this art in the six plays—"Julius Cæsar," "Hamlet," "Othello," "King Lear," "Macbeth," "Antony and Cleopatra"—seem only half-guessed as we read them and re-read them in the light of new thoughts.

In all of them Shakespeare knew the evil that was in the world, strong, vital, terrible, but never wholly destructive of good. There is faith and belief in goodness left. Of the "Big Four," "Hamlet" is the most subtly developed, "Othello" the most perfect in structure and form, "Lear" the grandest and most elemental, and "Macbeth" the most vehement. But I am dealing with superlatives and must fear, for each has some merit not possessed by the others.

These were the culminating years of a busy life in London. After this, for the last period of his life, the dramatist retired to his native town Stratford, buying himself a comfortable home, and living there. Successful men are fond of retiring in age to the places of their birth. It was so with Shakespeare, and thus he is buried in a prominent position beneath the chancel of the church where he was baptized.

His few latest plays all bear the note of this removal from the world of strife. The whole mental attitude has again become changed. The plays are no longer tragical. The heroines are beautiful attractive figures — Imogen, Katharine, Mariana, Perdita, Miranda. They suffer, but all ends happily, as a tale told to a child by an elder near a winter fireside. The men are not great and heroic enough, not sufficiently endowed with elemental strength and passion, for tragedy. In "A Winter's Tale," Leontes is unjust to his wife and lives twenty years mourning: Othello upon discovering his mistake stabbed himself forthwith. In "Cymbeline," Posthumus listens to Iachimo — a little Iago, his name almost seems to imply — and later the villain is brought to repentance: Iago could never have repented and Othello would never have lowered himself to enter into a conspiracy against his wife, although he could slay her.

A very ingenious theory has been advanced by Professor Thorndike of Columbia University: that Shakespeare, even to the last, as often before, is merely following a new fashion in these latest plays. Here Beaumont and Fletcher are his models, and "The Maid's Tragedy" is the prototype of this lyrical operatic form of dramatic romance. If this be so, Shakespeare again shows his genius by surpassing his competitors in the new type.

While it is uncertain as to which is Shakespeare's last play, I always think of "The Tempest" as being the dramatist's farewell to his art. The supernatural and fairy-lore are present as in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" and in Mercutio's speech. In the early play the poet had paid the well-known tribute to the poet's art; here he takes formal leave of his dramatist's occupation. As in all the plays of his later life, evil is not absent, nor is its meaning and destructiveness, so prominent in the tragedies, wholly cast aside. But the change in this last group of plays is this: the evil does not seem so black and has not so great sway. The poet-dramatist exercises control and patience in its presence and will not annoy innocence with this knowledge. Caliban is the symbol of evil: it exists even in the happy isle, and though bound and restrained, it is ever ready to break loose again. To the last, the poet, now grown grave and thoughtful and self-contained, thinks of this evil and all the problems which it has entailed. But his labours are now over, and the poet-magician, like Prospero, breaks his wand and gives over his art:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd.
Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled
 a turn or two I'll walk
To still my beating mind.

Can it be, as Mr. Bradley happily suggests, that it is the old memories rushing back? The old memories! — to the author of these plays and to us the students of them. It may be a fancy, and one fears to push it too far, but it haunts one.

I would close, as I began, with a special plea for the great things in literature, meaning in all literatures. I have heard good men call Dante foolishness, Milton uninteresting, the Iliad

and the *Odyssey* a superstition and a fetich — and they forthwith turn to the latest periodical and current popular work of fiction. There is no law about these things with individuals. Also at a late meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, two eminent speakers, in welcoming the members of the Association, emphasized on successive occasions that any general study of the ancient classics was doomed and that it rested with the teachers of the Modern Languages to determine the literary training and inspiration which men of the future would possess. Perhaps it must be so. But what I could not at the time help wondering was this: What sort of literary training and literary insight will be obtained and imparted by those who should not know the best wherever it may be found, who would willingly restrict themselves to one literature or even to several literatures of but one age? Knowing the best must include acquaintance with Homer, Æschylus and Sophocles, as well as with Dante and Cervantes and Molière and Goethe, with Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. I need make no plea for the ancients and for the classics generally, but it may be safely affirmed that a literary study of the moderns, early and late, not based upon some knowledge of ancient classical literature would very soon tend to become eccentric and volatile.

Nothing has ever taken, or will take, the place of the great things of all times, particularly of great poetry. As long as we must have the best, the study of no real classic in any literature is doomed to extinction or can possibly be wholly neglected. If I may quote from myself elsewhere: "The Tragedy of Orestes, the curse of Œdipus, the horror of Hamlet's doubt, the awfulness of Othello's and Lear's mistakes, the problems of Faust's self-struggles, are immortal, because we cannot think of an age when these questions and their expression in artistic form will not appeal to mankind. They must live. It is left to no haphazard vote-taking and change of public opinion. It is the ever longing, suffering, aspiring soul of man that proclaims it."

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